

AMENDMENTS TO THE CLAIMS

1. (Currently Amended) Bleached crosslinked fibers, comprising cellulose fibers ~~reacted~~ crosslinked with an effective amount of a polycarboxylic acid crosslinking agent in the presence of 1 to 10% by weight cellulose of a C₄-C₁₂ polyol and bleached after curing with a bleaching agent, said bleached crosslinked fibers having a Whiteness Index at least one unit greater than polycarboxylic acid crosslinked cellulose fibers comprising cellulosic fibers ~~reacted~~ crosslinked with an effective amount of a crosslinking agent in the presence of ~~an effective amount of 1 to 10 % by weight cellulose of a C₄-C₁₂ polyol~~ without bleaching wherein said crosslinked fibers prepared without bleaching have a Whiteness Index of at least about 70 ~~and wherein said bleached crosslinked fibers have a brightness greater than about 80 and wherein said Whiteness Index is measured after curing at 182°C to 215°C.~~

2. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the crosslinking agent is an α -hydroxypolycarboxylic acid.

3. (Original) The fibers of Claim 2, wherein the α -hydroxypolycarboxylic acid is selected from the group consisting of citric acid, malic acid, tartaric acid, tartronic acid, α -hydroxyglutaric acid, and citramalic acid and mixtures thereof.

4. (Original) The fibers of Claim 3, wherein the crosslinking agent is citric acid.

5. (Original) The fibers of Claim 3, wherein the crosslinking agent is malic acid.

6. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the polyol is selected from the group consisting of acyclic polyols, alicyclic polyols, and heterosides and mixtures thereof.

7. (Original) The fibers of Claim 6, wherein the acyclic polyol is selected from the group consisting of erythritol, xylitol, arabitol, ribitol, sorbitol, mannitol, perseitol, and volemitol and mixtures thereof.

8. (Original) The fibers of Claim 7, wherein the acyclic polyol is sorbitol.

9. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide.

10. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the bleaching agent comprises hydrogen peroxide in combination with sodium hydroxide.

11. (Canceled)

12. (Canceled)

13. (Original) The fibers of Claim 1, wherein the wet bulk is about 15.5 cc/g or greater.

14. (Original) An absorbent product comprising the fibers of Claim 1.

15. (Original) The product of Claim 14, wherein the product is an infant diaper, adult incontinence product, or feminine hygiene product.

16. (Original) The product of Claim 14, wherein the product is a tissue or towel.

17 (New) The fibers of Claim 1 wherein said bleached crosslinked fibers have a brightness greater than about 80.